



Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are some of the most intense, and frequently experienced, sources of stress and trauma that children may suffer early in life which can affect them as adults. They include multiple types of abuse including:

- ✚ Neglect
- ✚ violence between parents or caregivers
- ✚ alcohol and substance abuse peer, community and collective violence.

ACEs also include things that affect children indirectly through the environment they live in. This could be living with a parent or caregiver who has poor mental health, where there is domestic abuse, or where parents have divorced or separated. ACEs can be single events, long-term or repeated experiences. Research shows the more ACEs that occur in childhood, the higher the chances of adults having poor mental health and also physical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, liver disease and cancer. Having more ACEs also increases the likelihood of engaging in health harming behaviours in adulthood such as smoking or using drugs or alcohol, or being involved in crime.

Research into adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) consistently shows that a set of 10 adverse experiences in childhood are associated with an increased risk of poor health and other problems in later life. The strongest associations are seen between violence perpetration and victimisation, mental ill-health and substance misuse as the repeated stress of abuse, neglect and parents struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues has real, tangible effects on the development of the brain. This consistent and compelling evidence has brought greater focus from a wide range of policymakers and public services on the harm caused by child abuse, neglect and other adversities.

Research into adverse childhood experiences has generated a powerful and accessible narrative which has helpfully increased awareness of the lifetime impact of early adversity on children's outcomes.

However, poor outcomes are not inevitable and early intervention, particularly in childhood, can make a difference. It is important to show understanding to those who have ACEs, helping explore the question; "What happened to you, and what may help you?"



Trauma is a term for a wider set of experiences or events that can happen at any time of life and includes some of the adversities in childhood known as ACEs. Trauma affects us all, directly or indirectly. Many people live with the ongoing effects of past and present overwhelming stress (trauma). Despite the large numbers of people affected, many of us often don't think of the possibility that someone we meet, speak with or support may have experienced trauma, which makes us less likely to recognise it. Keeping the possibility of trauma in mind means keeping the sensitivities and vulnerabilities of people who may be trauma survivors in mind. It also means being respectful, acknowledging and understanding.

Having a basic understanding of how stress can affect individuals can help this process and make us less likely to fuel other people's stress levels. This means paying attention to how way we engage with others, as well as to 'what' we do. It also means thinking about what may have happened to someone, rather than judging what is 'wrong' with them. Trauma informed practice is a way of working that recognises:

- ✚ That anyone using a service may have experienced trauma or ACEs
- ✚ That people with a history of trauma may be less likely to engage with services
- ✚ The importance of relationships in preventing/recovering from the effects of trauma/ACEs

ACEs are very common; about half of all people will have experienced one ACE, and about one in ten will have experienced four or more. However, a lot of people do not develop problems despite having ACEs. Things that improve the chances of staying well despite experiencing ACEs include: relationships with trusted adults and physical activity in childhood. In adulthood, protective factors include community engagement, and supportive employers and services. Many organisations are now recognising the impact of ACEs, how they can be prevented and how to help people who have had them to live well.

Additional Resources:

[What are ACE's](#)

[ACE's - parliament](#)

[Kirklees – ACE's](#)

[Kirklees – ACE's Practice Guidance Presentation](#)